

# Prabhulinga Leelai

## Gorakkar Gati

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*Prabhulinga Leelai* is a 15th century Virasaiva work, written in Kannada and comprising 1,111 verses. It was originally composed when a Virasaiva scholar, Camarasa, was challenged to produce a work that was greater than either the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*. Shortly afterwards Camarasa had a dream in which Virabhadra, the son of Siva, asked him to write a long poem. Camarasa subsequently composed *Prabhulinga Leelai* in eleven days, after which he presented it at the court of his king, where it was approved by both the monarch and the scholars who had challenged him.

This Kannada work was translated into Tamil verse by Sivaprakasa Swamigal, an accomplished Virasaiva poet and scholar, in the seventeenth century. The Tamil version was read by Ramana Maharshi, who referred to it in his conversations with visitors on a number of occasions. Two of its verses are the source of one of Bhagavan's compositions (*Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* verse 20), and the chapter entitled 'Gorakkar Gati', part of which is translated here, was narrated

by Bhagavan in *Crumbs from his Table* (pp. 36-39). A synopsis of the main story of this chapter – the meeting between Allama Prabhu and Gorakkar – also appears in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 334 and *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, chapter 27.

The author of the Tamil version, Sivaprakasa Swamigal, had a strong connection with Tiruvannamalai. His father, Kumaraswami Desikar, used to come to Arunachala from Kanchipuram every year for the Deepam festival. It is said that his three sons, of whom Sivaprakasa Swamigal was the eldest, were all born by the grace of Arunachala. When Sivaprakasa Swamigal grew up, he had a Guru in Tiruvannamalai – also called Sivaprakasa – whom he visited regularly. On his first *pradakshina* of Arunachala, Sivaprakasa Swamigal composed *Sonasaila Malai*, a hundred-verse poem in praise of Arunachala.

On one of his journeys around Tamil Nadu Sivaprakasa Swamigal went to Tirunelveli to meet and be taught by a pandit who was an expert on grammar. This teacher accepted him as his student after Sivaprakasa Swamigal had demonstrated his exceptional proficiency in this subject. The pandit taught him everything he knew, but when Sivaprakasa Swamigal tried to pay for this tuition, he refused, saying that he would like payment of a different sort.

This pandit had been having a bitter feud with another scholar. Sivaprakasa Swamigal's teacher said, 'Go to this man, defeat him in a contest of Tamil prosody, and as a condition of his defeat, make him prostrate to me.'

Sivaprakasa Swamigal accepted the assignment, located the rival scholar, and challenged him to compose spontaneous verses, on a specified topic that they would both pick, that had no labial sounds in them. That is to say, the verses had to be composed without any letters such as 'm' and 'p', which are sounded by putting the lips together. The scholar was unable to compose a single verse with this restriction, whereas Sivaprakasa Swamigal managed to produce thirty-one on the prescribed theme. The rival scholar accepted defeat and went to prostrate before Sivaprakasa Swamigal's grammar teacher.

Sivaprakasa Swamigal died when he was only thirty-two, but in his short lifespan he composed many Tamil works. *Prabhulinga Leelai*,

the work that the following translation comes from, chronicles the life and deeds of Allama Prabhu, a 12th century Virasaiva saint and teacher. There are two traditions regarding Allama Prabhu's life. One sees him as a manifestation of Siva Himself who came to the world to teach the path of freedom. Sivaprakasa Swamigal follows this tradition in *Prabhulinga Leelai*. The other version of his life, which is found in a fifteenth-century biography by Harihara, describes a more normal upbringing in the family of a temple drummer. Whatever the truth of the matter, there is general agreement that he was one of the most eminent saints, poets and Gurus of the Virasaiva school. More details of his life will be given in the notes to the verses.

The 'Gorakkar Gati' ('The Chapter on Gorakkar') begins with Allama Prabhu journeying towards Srisailam (called here 'Mount Paruppatam'), a major Saiva pilgrimage centre in Andhra Pradesh.

7

Just as the gentle southern breeze  
caressing a grove of young trees  
causes their flame-like buds to blaze forth,  
He [Allama Prabhu] who is liberal in His compassion,  
was wandering around,  
having assumed a divine form that brought delight  
to the hearts and minds of His devotees.  
Beholding the broad-based Mount Paruppatam,  
over which clouds laden with rain hover,  
He advanced towards it.

**Note:** The next nineteen verses, which describe the scenery and the greatness of Mount Paruppatam, are omitted. The phrase 'such riches as these' in the next verse refers to these descriptions of Srisailam.

26

Allama, our King, He who is sweeter to us than a mother,  
drew near to our holy mountain

where such riches as these abound in plenty.  
He reached the place where Gorakkar dwelt,  
he who, full of arrogance, rejoiced greatly in his heart  
over his attainment of *kaya siddhi*.

**Note:** Gorakkar was a yogi who had striven hard to extend his lifespan and to make his body impervious to harm. Though the ideas espoused by Gorakkar seem to be very similar to those propounded by Goraknath, a famous north Indian yogi who lived between the sixth and ninth centuries, this Gorakkar is probably a different man.

*Kaya siddhi* is the attainment of being able to extend the lifespan of the body indefinitely, and to make it indestructible through magic potions and spiritual exercises.

27

Seeing the Supreme One approach, Gorakkar,  
deeming Him [Allama] to be a great *siddha* like himself,  
was filled with pride [in his own achievements].  
Instead of falling at the feet of the Eternal One,  
whose feet are full-blown lotus flowers,  
he stood there, with his hands joined together.  
After offering Him a seat, he began to speak:  
'You who are a *jnana siddha*, come!'

28

[Gorakkar speaks:]  
'Since it has been granted to me this day  
to greet your glorious arrival,  
on this day, for me, the sun has risen in heaven.  
What is more, on this day  
my eyes have attained true sight.  
Truth to tell, can such a meeting be easy to attain  
for those who have not performed  
*tapas* beyond compare?

29

'All the scriptures declare that those who do not unite  
with the band of devotees,  
who, with the virtuous qualities as their support,  
never swerve from the pure truth, can never unite  
with the One who bears an eye on His forehead.  
What profit can accrue, so to speak, to one  
who possesses no initial capital?'

**Note:** This verse is saying that satsang with devotees is the initial capital that is necessary if one wants the ultimate profit – gaining union with Siva. The verse is derived from a similar idea that appears in *Tirukkural*, verse 449:

For those with no initial capital, there will be no gain; for the  
king who lacks the support of wise counsellors there will be  
no stability.

30

Having addressed the Supreme Guru  
with pleasant remarks of this kind,  
in accordance with the civilities to be offered to a guest,  
he [Gorakkar] said: 'Pray tell, Great One,  
who are You who come here?'  
He stood in a questioning attitude,  
offering praise to that fair Ocean of Grace.

31

[Allama replied:]  
'One who has eradicated as alien [to himself]  
the dense, fundamental illusion of egoity  
and has, in full clarity, realised the Self –  
such a one will be able to know Me also.  
What point is there in speaking to one  
who remains attached to the perishable body?'  
So proclaimed He who knows *jnani*  
who have realised the truth non-dually.

**Note:** The implication of the idea expressed in the final sentence seems to be that Allama Prabhu can see that Gorakkar is not enlightened. The last two lines can also be translated as, ‘He who knows all *jnanis* as not different [from His own Self]’.

32

Fully convinced that his body,  
composed of the five elements, was his true self,  
[Gorakkar] declared:  
‘He who, by the grace of the primal Lord,  
has acquired *kaya siddhi*  
through the use of magic pills and other methods,  
will never die. This being so, death will come  
to him who has not acquired them.’

33

[Allama replied:]  
‘You have stated that life is the body’s life,  
and that death is the death of this sack stuffed with flesh,  
which is the body. It seems to me  
that you think that your body is your very self.  
Your perception of the body is like that of the Materialists  
who do not know anything other than the body.’

**Note:** Allama is alluding to a group (*Sarvaka*) which maintained that only information received by the senses can be regarded as valid knowledge. These people do not therefore accept the existence of God or the existence of any state after death. Allama continues:

34

‘Sir, if the body is “I”, then why do you refer to it as “my” body?  
There are people who regard clothes and gold [ornaments],  
which are worn and removed,  
as their possessions,  
but if one ponders on this,

are there any among them  
who will call any of these items “I”?  
Speak!’ said Allama.

35

Gorakkar stood [his ground], and asked:  
‘Since we say “I thought, I ran [and so on],”  
then please explain to me what this is that is called “I”.’  
The virtuous and supreme *Jnana* Guru lovingly replied:

36

‘The statement “I thought” pertains to the mental faculties only.  
In the same way, the “I” will have to be identified  
with the body, the sense organs and the mental faculties.  
If this is true, the “I” will become many [and not one].  
So, know that what you say is erroneous superimposition.’

**Note:** Allama uses the word *attiyasam*, which is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit *adhyasa*. It means the transference of an attribute from one thing to another which does not really possess it.

37

[Gorakkar queried:]  
‘When we say, “My life will cease,”  
is there any other life apart from that life  
that we can speak of?  
Flawless Mountain of Pure Grace, please clarify!  
He who affords us the gracious protection  
of His fair and tender lotus feet replied:

38

‘We use the term “life” to describe the activity of the *prana*,  
but that term is really, in its true sense, a name for the Self,  
which is, in fact, entirely distinct from this *prana*.

So say those who understand the grammar of language.’  
This spoke our Lord, out of true understanding,  
to abolish his delusion.

39

[Allama continues:]

‘When the arcane *Vedas* proclaim that Self  
is being-consciousness-bliss,  
why have you ruined yourself, thinking this body to be “I”,  
when it is merely a deceiving hovel of misery,  
stuffed with flesh, fat, bones and skin,  
which endures no longer than a lightning flash, and is gone?’

40

‘Just as a man will feel disgust if he touches  
some unclean filth that lies in the street,  
one who has set his heart upon gaining true liberation,  
which abolishes the birth that fills him with terror,  
will feel revulsion for the impure bodily form  
and free himself from it.’

41

‘Like those who take medicine to cure an illness,  
the great ones embrace *Sivam*,  
intent upon quitting this remnant of a body.  
Why do you endeavour to remain united  
with this body with which you have identified?  
This is like a sick person who takes medicine  
in order to remain united with his disease!’

**Note:** This verse may be the origin of Bhagavan’s statement that was recorded by Muruganar as verse 233 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

People devoid of worth, who dwell in the poisonous ego, the  
ignorance that persists as the source of every deadly ailment,

will tirelessly perform *tapas* to strengthen the physical body.  
They are like those who take a powerful medicine to intensify  
their disease.

Bhagavan expressed similar views in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* (18th January, 1946) when conversation in the hall turned to the various concoctions (*kaya kalpas*) that were used by those who wanted to prolong their lives:

The talk turned to various recipes suggested by various people about *kaya kalpa*. Bhagavan mentioned a few *kalpas* based on camphor, a hundred year old neem tree, etc., and said, ‘Who would care to take such trouble over this body? As explained in books, the greatest malady we have is the body, the ‘disease of birth’, and if one takes medicines to strengthen it and prolong its life, it is like a man taking medicine to strengthen and perpetuate his disease. As the body is a burden we bear, we should on the other hand feel like a cooly engaged to carry a load, anxiously looking forward to arrival at the destination when he can throw off his burden.’

42

‘Was there ever a body born that was able to avoid death?  
If you throw a stone into the sky,  
is there any possibility that it will not fall back down?  
Effects, however significant and enduring, will pass away.  
But that which does not undergo death,  
and is known as the Cause, that endures always.’

43

‘All your plans to render your body immortal  
through the use of potions will accomplish nothing  
other than prolonging the span of your bodily existence.’

Your statement that the body is indestructible is untenable.  
It is not proper that you should thus assert  
that your body is indestructible.  
You whose penances are great, at least, henceforth,  
seek only liberation,' said the Lord.

44

[Gorakkar replied:]  
'Irrespective of what you say, my body cannot ever be destroyed.  
Why argue the matter? This very day shall I,  
by the grace of the Primal Lord, demonstrate my power.'  
Having thus addressed the faultless Ocean of Grace,  
Gorakkar did the following:

45

Handing to our Lord a shining sword, sharp and true,  
like the powerful weapon that Indra held  
when he clove the mountains  
where the sweet music of babbling streams resounds,  
he declared:  
'I being what I am, pray, hurl this at me  
with all the strength of your mighty shoulders!'

**Note:** There is a puranic story that recounts how mountains once had the ability to fly. Unfortunately, they generally caused a huge amount of damage whenever they tried to land anywhere. To stop this unnecessary destruction, Indra used his *vajra*, a weapon with two blades that were perpendicular to a short handle that was grasped in the hand, to sever the wings of the mountains and maroon them permanently on the ground.

46

Standing before him, inflated with pride,  
he [Gorakkar] cried, 'Sire, if so much as a sliver of skin,  
no thicker than a fly's wing,

is cut away, then I am no *siddha!*'  
Allama graciously decided,  
'I will do exactly as this man  
who thinks himself immortal  
desires, and banish the deep pride  
that he stores up in his heart.'

47

That Rain of Grace took the sword.  
Wielding it with the swiftness of lightning,  
he raised it on high  
and brought it down on [Gorakkar's] body  
with a din that was like a thunderbolt in the heavens.  
It was as if he had struck a great and enduring mountain.  
A great noise rose up, reverberating throughout the sky.

48

The holy Mountain Paruppatam trembled!  
The daughter of Himavan,  
filled with a terror impossible to describe,  
thought to her herself, 'The demon [Ravana] has come,  
it would seem, and in his powerful fury,  
has [tried] this day to lift up this [Mount Paruppatam] also!'  
and went rushing into the arms of Lord Siva.

**Note:** This is a reference to a story in which the demon Ravana went to Mount Kailash and lifted it up. The 'daughter of Himavan' is Parvati, the consort of Siva.

49

Just as the *asuna* bird that listens to the sound of lutes  
played by *vidhyadhara* damsels  
will faint on hearing the drumbeat  
of the great hunter women with five-fold plaits,  
so all the people of the world grew weak in their hearts.

Sleeping beasts jumped to their feet and ran away.  
Birds rose up in flocks, and rain poured down.

**Note:** The *vidhyadhara* damsels are celestial musicians. The *asuna* bird is a mythical creature that is highly sensitive to music. When it becomes fascinated by notes and harmonies, a sudden loud beat of the drum causes its instantaneous death.

50

As [Gorakkar] stood there without a scratch upon his body  
while this thunderous noise rose on high,  
Allama realised that the pride he had exhibited before  
had now tripled its former proportions,  
[making him] full of admiration for himself,  
convinced in his heart that no man was his equal.

51

Clapping his hands together [Allama] exclaimed:  
'In this world, where the wind wanders free,  
there is no one equal to you,  
you who have attained a physical form so strong  
that it can produce such a sound!'  
Then, with a derisive smile,  
He [Allama] proffered him the sword that He held  
in the lotus flower of His hand.

52

'Wielding this sword you hold with all your strength,  
and that of all your followers, attempt to strike Me,'  
said our Lord, remaining where He stood.  
The *siddha* in turn fearlessly raised the sword  
and smote the form of Him who is beyond compare.

53

The sword did not affect that matchless body,  
but passed harmlessly through it.  
It was as if it had sliced through a ray of sunlight,  
which is more subtle than an atom.  
Is it possible for a sword to touch  
that cool and fragrant Supreme Light,  
which the never-sagging breasts of Maya,  
whose arms are more slender than bamboo,  
could not embrace?

**Note:** In the version of Allama's life that holds him to be a manifestation of Siva, Allama is not physically born. He instead appears as a baby by the side of a couple who had been doing *tapas* to gain a 'truth-bringing, sorrowless' son. When he grew up, he became a drummer in the local temple. He eventually became the dancing teacher of Maya, whom Parvati had sent to tempt him.

Bhagavan has narrated the incident that the end of this verse refers to in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 334:

**Bhagavan:** There was a dialogue between Siva and Parvati in Kailas. Siva said that Allama was one who would not be affected by her blandishments. Parvati wanted to try it and so sent her tamasic quality to incarnate as a king's daughter on the earth in order that she might entice Allama. She grew up as a highly accomplished girl. She used to sing in the temple. Allama used to go there and play on the drum. She lost herself in the play of the drum. She fell in love with him. They met in her bedroom. When she embraced him he became intangible. She grew lovesick. But a celestial damsel was sent to remind her of her purpose on the earth. She resolved to overthrow Allama but did not succeed. Finally she went up to Kailas. Then Parvati sent her sattvic quality who was born as a brahmin *sannyasini*. When she surrendered to Allama she realised his true greatness.

54

Striking empty space, Gorakkar's arms grew weak  
and he was filled with wonder for the Lord.  
'The Supreme Light that I worship is truly He!' he cried,  
his body perspiring as he quaked with fear.  
Abandoning the pride he had entertained,  
he began to follow the true path of pure love.  
After prostrating himself at the feet of our King,  
which are luxuriant lotus flowers, filled with nectar,  
he rose to his feet and began to speak:

55

'Not recognising Your [true nature], like one intoxicated,  
with pride in my heart, I contemplated evil deeds.  
Later I stood before You, and contradicted You,  
babbling wicked nonsense like a madman.  
Like a hunter who kills and snatches away dear life,  
I have committed all these sins.  
Father, out of your great and enduring grace,  
may You cleanse me of all of them  
and be my gracious Master.'

56

That great Flood of Compassion declared:  
'If, setting aside your former misdeeds,  
you cease henceforth from your erring ways,  
free yourself from attachment to the body,  
and come to understand your own true nature,  
you will be delightful to Me.'  
[Gorakkar replied:]  
'You who feed me the rare ambrosia of heaven,  
pardoning and destroying the faults  
that render salvation unattainable for me!  
You who are a pure and radiant jewel!  
What might I offer you in recompense?'

57

'Show me the full measure of your compassion,  
and reveal to me the true reality that I desire,  
that I may fully know it.'  
Thus replied Gorakkar, who stood there, free of desire  
for the body to which he had clung.  
The Radiant Supreme, who cannot be known  
by knowledge gained from mere learning,  
realising his spiritual maturity,  
felt compassion for him.  
His [Allama's] holy heart, which had attained  
to the state of the divine, filled with joy.  
'Listen with devotion,' He said:

58

'If you come to know *Gubesan* [The Lord of the Cave]  
as He really is,  
the disease of birth will be ended for you,  
and you will, as is fit, experience supreme bliss,'  
said He who is without blemish.  
[Gorakkar] replied: 'Praise be to You, my Father!  
Show me Your loving compassion, and explain  
the true meaning of the word *Gubesan*.  
Show me Your grace that I may know  
and fully comprehend who it is  
that is designated by that name.'  
With [Gorakkar] paying homage, our Lord replied:

59

'Note well the meaning [of this word]:  
The cave [*guhāi*] is the Heart,  
and the one who dwells within it is *Isan*, the Lord.  
I Myself am the one who is implied  
by the word *Gubesan*.'

Thus declared the Flawless One.  
 At this the *siddha* rejoiced in his heart,  
 and his face lit up as he asked:  
 ‘If You are [the Lord], then why in Your hand,  
 that is like a tender blossoming lotus flower,  
 do You hold a Siva *lingam*? Please explain.’

60

‘Desiring that the inhabitants of the world,  
 in order to reap the fruit of this birth,  
 should unwaveringly perform *puja*  
 with flowers in their hands to the revered Siva *lingam*,  
 I always hold in my hand this emblem  
 that represents My all-embracing form,  
 never letting go of it. Let your mind  
 be clear in the knowledge of this.’  
 Thus did the God and Guru speak,  
 vouchsafing His grace.

**Note:** Though Allama here describes the significance of the *lingam* that is attached to his hand, he does not go into the details of how the *lingam* came to be there in the first place.

In the version of Allama Prabhu’s life that gives him earthly parents, he fell in love with a girl called Kamalate, whose name means ‘the tendril of love’. However, Kamalate was struck down with a fever, from which she subsequently died. Allama Prabhu took to wandering around, mad with grief. After losing his memory of who he was and where he had come from, he went from village to village calling out the name of Kamalate. While he was sitting in a grove of trees, lost in his grief, he idly scratched the ground with his toes and noticed the pinnacle of a buried temple just under the ground. He had the place excavated and eventually found a closed door in front of what appeared to be the main shrine. He kicked down the door and went in. Sitting before him was a yogi in an open-eyed trance; the focus of his gaze

appeared to be the *lingam* in the shrine. The yogi, whose name was Animisayya, was glowing with an inner light. The name Animisayya means the ‘open-eyed one’, or ‘the one without eyelids’. While Allama was standing there astonished, Animisayya put a *lingam* into his hand. As he handed over the *lingam*, Animisayya’s life force left him and went into Allama Prabhu. In that moment of transference, Allama Prabhu became enlightened. For the remainder of his life he wandered around wherever the Lord called him to go.

The phrase ‘Lord of the Cave’ (*Gubhesan*) is one that appears in almost all of Allama’s *vacanas*, his mystical poems. It seems to be his favourite epithet for the transcendent reality.

It has been conjectured that this phrase may also be a reference to this underground yogi who became his Guru and enlightened him.

In the version of Allama Prabhu’s life that claims that he is a manifestation of Siva, he discovers the underground shrine and meets the yogi who is meditating there. The *lingam* jumps from the yogi’s hands into Allama Prabhu’s palm, where it sticks and remains for the rest of his life. Since Allama Prabhu, in this version, is Siva Himself, there is no question of any transference of power.

61

‘In accordance with the injunction  
 solemnly enjoined upon us  
 by the *Vedas* and all the other holy books,  
 that a guru and teacher should always  
 engage in the performance of good works,  
 he who has the ability to subdue the power  
 of the fetter [of bondage] in the aspirant, the mature seeker,  
 should only abandon the performance of good deeds  
 when his body dies, and not before.’

62

Having thus revealed His own nature,  
 the Lord said: ‘In the same way that you once remained

with the firm conviction 'I am the body',  
 if, having known Myself who stand here,  
 you now become established in the conviction  
 'I am He' [*soham bhavana*],  
 your state of ignorance will disappear  
 just as deadly cobra poison  
 can be rendered ineffective  
 by dwelling upon the thought of Garuda.

**Note:** Garuda, the divine eagle, is a mortal enemy of the cobra. In the same way that the mere thought of this bird is supposed to render cobra venom harmless, the conviction 'I am He' will counteract the insidious poison of the 'I am the body' idea.

The ideas in verses fifty-nine and sixty-two were taken by Bhagavan and rewritten in a Tamil verse that eventually appeared as verse twenty of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*:

The Lord who shines within the cave that is the Lotus of the Heart is worshipped as *Guhesan* [Lord of the Cave]. If, by strength of daily practice, the conviction 'I am *Guhesan*', in other words, 'I am He', becomes as firm as the [present] identification of the 'I' with the body, and you [thereby] remain established as that Lord, the ignorance that takes the perishable body to be oneself will vanish like darkness before the golden sun.

Allama Prabhu's meeting with Gorakkar was also recorded in a work entitled *Sunyasampadane* (*The Achievement of Nothingness*). There, after Gorakkar has conceded defeat, Allama Prabhu says:

With your alchemies  
 you achieve metals but no essence.  
 With all your manifold yogas  
 you achieve a body but no spirit.  
 With your speeches and arguments

you build chains of words  
 but cannot define the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

63

Having fully realised the meaning of the words spoken to him, out of His grace, by the supreme *Jnana* Guru, Gorakkar abandoned the idea that his body was his true form, realised the true reality, giving up everything that was other than that truth, and attained the Self, banishing [even] the deluded notion 'I am That'. Becoming the Self, he remained in that place enjoying praise that even the Gods cannot know.

**Note:** The phrase 'I am That' could also be translated as 'I am realised'. It probably means that Gorakkar moved on from the inner conviction 'I am That' to the final concept-free experience in which there is no longer an 'I' that can claim liberation or enlightenment. ▲

<sup>1</sup>*Sunyasampadane*, ed. S. S. Bhoosnurmath, pub. Dharwar 1958, p. 449, cited in *Speaking of Siva* by A. K. Ramanujan, pub. Penguin 1985, p. 147.